

EQUALITY, QUALITY AND QUANTITY: THE ELUSIVE TRIANGLE IN INDIAN EDUCATION

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The simultaneous pursuit of equality of opportunity and improvement of standards in the face of scarce resources confronts Indian education with a dilemma common to many countries. Equality and quality are relatively new values for education in India stimulated by the British system and the influence of the ideals of nationalist leaders like Gandhi, but they only gain ground slowly. The modernization process has introduced some changes into class and caste structures in the social and economic context of education, but the situation of the rural masses remains essentially unchanged. In the drive for equality of opportunity, there has been a visible advance in the enrolment of girls, though this may not reflect a real change in status. The same may be said of the education of the lower intermediate and scheduled castes. Regional disparities within the country also continue.

The high rate of adult illiteracy has only recently been seen as a major problem, requiring massive government action. In primary education there has been rapid growth, despite continued wastage, but the effects of the power structure on the allocation of resources to education are seen in the reckless expansion of secondary and higher education. Examination of the quality aspect reveals the dual nature of the system, with high standards in a small group of institutions and a less favourable situation in the majority. The major obstacle here is the lack of resources.

La poursuite simultanée de l'égalité des chances et de l'amélioration des niveaux, en dépit des ressources réduites, place l'éducation indienne devant un dilemme que connaissent également bon nombre de pays. L'égalité et la qualité sont des valeurs relativement nouvelles dans l'éducation en Inde et elle ne gagnent du terrain que lentement, bien qu'elles aient été stimulées par le système britannique et par l'influence des idéaux des leaders nationalistes comme Gandhi. Le processus de modernisation a apporté quelques changements dans les structures de classes et de castes, pour ce qui est du contexte économique et social de l'éducation, mais la situation des masses rurales demeure fondamentalement inchangée. Le mouvement pour l'égalité des chances a été marqué par une augmentation dans la fréquentation scolaire des filles mais cela ne reflète pas forcément un changement réel de la situation. Il en va de même pour l'éducation des castes inférieures et de la dernière caste ("scheduled castes"). Les inégalités régionales subsistent aussi.

Ce n'est que récemment que le taux élevé de l'analphabétisme des adultes a été considéré comme un problème majeur réclamant une action gouvernementale massive. Dans l'éducation primaire il s'est produit un développement rapide, en dépit d'un déchet continu, mais les effets de la structure du pouvoir sur l'allocation des ressources pour l'éducation sont visibles dans le développement imprudent de l'éducation secondaire et supérieure. L'examen de la qualité révèle la nature double du système, avec des normes élevées dans un petit nombre d'institutions

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et une situation moins favorable pour la majorité. L'obstacle essentiel est constitué ici par le manque de ressources.

Durch das gleichzeitige Streben nach Chancengleichheit und nach Hebung des Lebensstandards bei geringen Mitteln gerät das indische Bildungswesen in ein Dilemma, das es mit vielen Ländern gemeinsam hat. Gleichheit und Qualität sind im Hinblick auf die Bildung in Indien verhältnismäßig neue Werte, angeregt durch das britische System und beeinflusst von den Idealen volkseigner Führer wie Gandhi, aber sie setzen sich nur langsam durch. Infolge des Modernisierungsprozesses wurden in den sozialen und wirtschaftlichen Bildungszusammenhängen einige Veränderungen in den Klassen- und Kastenstrukturen eingeführt, aber die Lage der ländlichen Massen bleibt im wesentlichen unverändert.

Beim Ringen um Chancengleichheit hat es hinsichtlich der Einschulung von Mädchen einen sichtbaren Fortschritt gegeben, wenn das auch vielleicht noch keine tatsächliche Statusveränderung ausdrückt. Dasselbe könnte man von den niedrigeren Kasten und Urstämmen sagen. Ebenso bestehen weiterhin regionale Ungleichheiten innerhalb des Landes.

Der hohe Prozentsatz erwachsener Analphabeten wurde erst kürzlich als wesentliches Problem erkannt, das durchgreifende staatliche Maßnahmen erfordert. Zwar kam es, trotz anhaltender Vergeudung, auf dem Primärsektor zu einem schnellen Ausbau, aber die Auswirkungen der Machtstruktur auf die Verteilung der Bildungsmittel zeigen sich in der unüberlegten Ausweitung der Ober- und Hochschulbildung. Bei der Untersuchung des qualitativen Aspekts offenbart sich die Zwiespältigkeit des Systems: Hohes Niveau bei einer kleinen Gruppe von Einrichtungen und eine weniger günstige Lage für die Mehrheit. Das Haupthindernis liegt hier im Fehlen der Mittel.

Educational planners in India have, since the attainment of independence in 1947, tried to pursue programmes oriented to securing equality of educational opportunity, improvement of standards and expansion of educational facilities in spite of scarcity of resources. The simultaneous pursuit of these goals is not easy, partly because no country, however rich, can provide *all* the resources these programmes will need and partly because the pursuit of these goals needs many inputs besides the financial. The object of this paper is to highlight some of the problems involved in an exercise of this type by special reference to the Indian case.

Theoretical Acceptance of the New Values

It is well to remember that these educational values are new to Indian thought and that their acceptance by the Indian society is comparatively recent. The Indian society grew up highly stratified, based on class and caste, and justified these inequalities as rewards or retributions for one's actions in earlier lives and sanctified them through religion. Inequality rather

than equality was thus the basis of traditional Hindu society and it remained largely unaffected even after the advent of Islam.

Similarly, the traditional Hindu society did not believe in equality of educational opportunity. Education, which then meant mostly the study of religion through Sanskrit (the language of the Gods), was not open, at the end of the eighteenth century, to large social groups like women or the untouchable castes. In fact, at this time, education was open, in practice, to very few outside the Brahmin castes. The Muslim society had no such taboos and believed that every one should study the Quran. But even in this society, formal education was limited to a few. "Quality" in education also had a different meaning both to Hindus and Muslims: it implied "learnedness" or familiarity with religious literature in depth, "purity" or preservation of the ancient traditional interpretations unalloyed by modern influences, the "saintliness" or personal conduct which would remain irreproachable by religious standards. In short, the Indian traditions in society and education included neither equality of educational opportunity nor a concept of education for all and had a narrow interpretation of "quality".

The contact with the West which came in the wake of the British conquest of India started a renaissance in Indian life which, over about 200 years, ushered in the concepts of equality of educational opportunity, education for all, and secularization of education which implied that education was essentially meant for improvement of life here and now upon this earth rather than in other worlds and after death. The first steps in this direction were taken by the British administrators themselves although they were, by and large, unwilling to intervene in the religion and social customs of the people. For instance, the British encouraged the study of Sanskrit and the ancient classics but they insisted that such studies should be open, not to Brahmins only as in the past, but to all citizens including the scheduled castes. They also encouraged the education of girls and opened out new careers for them, especially in teaching, nursing and medicine. They also strove to expand education among the people and especially among the intermediate and low castes, the untouchable groups and the scheduled tribes. But with this, their contribution to equality came to an end. On the other hand, some of their policies were positively inegalitarian and elitist rather than mass-oriented. For instance, they introduced into India the class-based system of "public" schools with which they were familiar (without the element of State scholarships for selected children) so that we have since had a dual system of segregated schools in which the good quality private schools serve the needs of the well-to-do while the schools in the public sector which are really of poor or medium quality are the only ones

available to the children of the have-nots. The British also took an elitist rather than a popular view in education and believed that they could not and would not strive to educate the people and that instead, they would only educate the upper classes whose responsibility it would be to educate the masses at a later stage. However, they did yet another useful service in secularising education. The official schools did not provide any religious instruction. What is even more important, the modern education they introduced inculcated the idea that education implied a pursuit of all knowledge, and especially that of science, and was to be pursued for utilitarian ends (like getting a job under government) and for improving life on earth. As stated earlier, this gave a new dimension to "quality".

This new orientation initiated in the early years of modern education (say, in the nineteenth century), was strengthened and carried further during the struggle for freedom and the consequent movement for evolving a national system of education (1906-1947). The nationalist leaders, and especially Mahatma Gandhi whose contribution to this regeneration of national life was most outstanding, were committed to the values of equality and desired to create a society which was casteless and classless. They were for abolition of untouchability and for equality of status for women. They stood for democracy, for abolition of poverty, and for a rational and secular outlook on life. While adopting these new values, they also desired to preserve the best of our cultural tradition such as a concern for spirituality. They wanted free and compulsory elementary education for all and Gandhiji's idea of universal education meant, as he himself once said, an education whose content was equivalent to that of the matriculation *plus* craft *minus* English. They wanted the highest emphasis to be laid on science and technology and on technical and vocational education. In short, they looked upon education as an instrument to create a greater India rather than a lesser England. It was these ideas of the national leaders that were ultimately incorporated in the Preamble to the Constitution (adopted in 1950) which said that the People of India would strive to create a new social order based on the values of equality, freedom, justice and dignity of the individual; and it was the same leadership that created the concept of a national system of education based on the solid foundation of concepts like education for all and equality of educational opportunity, and a new annotation to the quality of education which implied an endless pursuit of truth and excellence.

While even the theoretical acceptance of these new values and concepts must be regarded as an extremely progressive step, it is obvious that it requires a long and painful effort to translate them into action. This effort has begun, but we still have a long long way to go. It is therefore necessary

to hold critical periodical reviews to assess our achievements and failures and the reasons for them. This can help us to improve our strategy and press ahead with greater vigour and precision. What is attempted here therefore is a review of what has happened or not happened in translating these new values and concepts into action in the three decades of the post-independence period (1947-76). This could help us to make better progress towards our goals in the following quarter of a century (1976-2000).

The Socio-Economic Background

Education cannot be transformed in a vacuum. It is a sub-system of society and a largely dependent sub-system at that. Consequently one must make a simultaneous effort to change society and the educational system in a complementary fashion to get the best results. To put it a little differently, there are three essential forms of power: political power, economic power and knowledge power. All these forms of power are obviously inter-related; and if we desire to have an equitable distribution of knowledge power, we can achieve our objective only if we take simultaneous steps to have an equitable distribution of political and economic powers as well. This, by and large, has not yet happened in the Indian society.

The traditional Indian society was hierarchical and elitist. The centre of power was in the three "twice-born" upper-castes: the learned *Brahmins* (who represented knowledge power); the powerful *Kshatriyas* or aristocracy which represented political and military power; and the *Vaishvas* or merchants who represented money power. They formed a numerically small upper crust of society and thus concentrated all power and access to resources in themselves. The rest of the people consisted of the *shudras* or workers and slaves and the *antyajas* or untouchables etc. who lived on the fringe of society and were deprived of education and most other good things of life. This picture did not change materially even with the advent of Islam because the Muslim population, though retaining its own distinctive characteristics, got divided into the same or similar social classes. The task of converting this society into an egalitarian one was obviously most difficult and complex, all the more so because it was as a whole extremely poor.

In the last two hundred years, this society has changed a good deal under the impact of contact with the West, the development of a capitalist economy, the introduction of science and technology, and modern education. The caste system and the hierarchy are still there and fairly strong; but their

rigours are toned down to some extent and there is a fair amount of vertical mobility. Modernization is on the way. The upper castes and social classes who were well-to-do were also most able to avail themselves of modern education and it is these social groups that have been modernized. They thus feel closer to the international elite with whom they can speak English and share life-styles and values than with the masses of the Indian people themselves.

But modernization of the upper classes is not equal to the modernization of society as a whole. The bulk of the people still continue to live traditional lives in great drudgery and poverty so that the gap between the top elite and the masses has, in a way, widened rather than been bridged. This basic inequality is reinforced in several other ways. For instance, the social groups working in the organized sector of modern industry have better wages and far higher standards of living than those in the large, unorganized traditional sector. The well-to-do in urban areas live a fairly modern life with access to modern educational, health and other services which are mostly denied to the people living in rural areas or urban slums.

The ownership of the means of production also continues to be largely skewed. The vast bulk of the land is still owned by a small minority and the large majority of rural people are marginal cultivators or landless agricultural labourers. The ownership of other forms of property is also equally or even more skewed. The wage structure is arbitrary and inegalitarian. The wages in the government services, in modern industry and in the organized sector are fixed arbitrarily and at very high levels for the simple reason that these social groups compare themselves with their counterparts in the West. What is even more important, these groups have the strength to secure wage increases by holding the State or industry to ransom and generally protect themselves well against inflationary trends. On the other hand, there is great unemployment and underemployment in the agricultural and other unorganized sectors and the wages continue to be low and uncertain. What is worse, these large groups suffer most from the inflationary trends against which they can hardly protect themselves.

It is true that the Constitution provides for adult franchise. But this has not necessarily led to a dispersal of political power because the poor are not adequately awakened or organized. It is mostly the upper and middle classes and their henchmen from the poorer social groups that monopolize political power by putting up populist stances; and although ruling individuals or sub-groups within them may change, power still continues to be largely wielded by the elite belonging mostly to the upper and middle classes. Even the benefits of education are very inequitably distributed: the upper and the

middle classes get most of its rewards while the masses have continued illiterate.

In short, Indian society seems to have changed very little in its basic essentials. In the traditional society, education was centred round religion. But access to it was limited to the three upper or twice-born castes (they were called twice-born because initiation into education to which they were entitled was regarded as a second birth) which wielded most of the political and economic power. Thus a small elite consisting of Brahmins (or learned men), Kshatriyas (or aristocracy) and Vaishyas (or men of wealth) ruled, while the vast bulk of the people slaved in poverty. Today, education has been secularized and modernized. But the ruling classes still form a similar elite: the employees of the State (who corresponds to the Kshatriyas); and the modern educated individuals representing the university system (who correspond to the Brahmins). The only difference is that while the status of these ruling elites is mostly determined by their social origins, they are not totally determined by caste and there is an element of vertical mobility. They also form a much larger group now than they did in the past, both in absolute figures and in proportional strength. The masses still continue to be poor, traditional and exploited; and the difference between their life-styles and those of the elite has increased rather than decreased in the last two hundred years.

The continuing poverty of India poses a great obstacle to the spread of equality. If wealth had increased adequately it would have been far easier to give more to the poor and to raise their standards of living*. But the Indian economy has remained sluggish and the average rate of growth has been only about 3 per cent over the last three decades. On the other hand, the population has grown very rapidly so that the rate of growth of per capita income has been only between one and two per cent. Under these conditions, economic disparities generally tend to widen because the rich and powerful grab the bulk of the additional wealth. The only way to control this trend is for the State to intervene effectively in the interests of the poor, or for the poor to organize and assert themselves, or for a change of heart to occur within the ruling classes themselves who try to share life with the poor. Nothing of this is effectively happening; and as Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru once observed, equality is accepted in theory but denied in practice almost everywhere.

* This of course does not necessarily follow; there are examples of countries where poverty continues to increase in spite of rapid economic growth.

Equality of Educational Opportunity

It is against this socio-economic background that we should evaluate India's educational programmes developed in the last thirty years (1947-76) on the basis of the simultaneous pursuit of equality, quality and quantity as fundamental educational objectives. Let us begin with equality of educational opportunity.

Equality of educational opportunity has several aspects. The most important of these is the recognition of the right to education as a human right or as the birth-right of every individual irrespective of religion, caste, race, language, colour, class or socio-economic status. Here several advances have been made.

1) In the ancient Indian tradition, the right of education was conferred only on the three higher castes. This had some validity when education meant the study of religion, ancient classics and the sanskrit language which were considered to be a privilege of the "pure" upper castes and whose study was denied to the "impure" lower castes. With the secularization of education, this concept has been totally given up. The British, as stated earlier, supported the study of sanskrit and the ancient tradition; but they threw them open to all citizens, irrespective of caste, sex or religion. In the other branches of education which began in the modern period, there were no earlier inhibitions to be overcome, and the principle of equality of access to all citizens was accepted right from the start. The fundamental principle that every citizen has equal access to every kind of knowledge has thus come to be firmly established.

2) Another important issue relates to the education of girls and women. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, formal education was mostly restricted to boys. Very few girls (in fact a microscopic minority) attended schools or learnt at home. In several areas and among large social groups, there was strong resistance to the education of girls. The first girls' schools were started by missionaries. Government came in later and in 1850, Lord Dalhousie, the then Governor-General of India, gave strong official support to the education of girls. It began to spread rapidly as the educated Indians themselves took up the cause and the age of marriage (which used to be eight or even earlier) began to rise owing to socio-economic factors. At first, girls were sent mostly to primary schools; their secondary education came much later; and the large expansion of college education among women is mostly a post-independence phenomenon. Similarly, the education of girls began in urban areas which first felt the impact of modernization but has now spread to rural areas as well. It also began among the upper and middle classes and

is now spreading among the poor and lower social groups. In a way, the changes have been almost dramatic. In 1800, very few girls were in school at all. In 1854, only a few thousand girls were enrolled in the modern education system. Even in 1882, the total enrolment of girls was less than 200,000. In 1947, their enrolment had increased considerably at the primary stage but there were only about 25,000 girls in colleges. At present, the total enrolment of girls is about 40 million and that in higher education is about one million. There are three girls enrolled for every five boys in elementary schools, two girls for every five boys in secondary schools, and one for every five boys at the university stage. With the spread of education, women's status has considerably improved in several respects (i.e. laws relating to inheritance, marriage and divorce), the Constitution has given them *de jure* equality in all matters, and they have been able to get careers outside the home in most spheres of life though teaching, nursing and medicine continue to dominate the scene. On the other hand, there are several causes for concern. Most of this spread of education is limited to the urban upper and middle classes. Even the over-all rate of literacy for women is as low as 18 per cent and in several areas, it is even as low as 2 per cent. Besides, "development" seems to be by-passing women if not adversely affecting their interests. The sex ratio was adverse even in 1947 and since then, it has been continually becoming more adverse. This only shows that the statistics of the spread of education among girls and women or their increasing employment in the organized sector do not tell the whole story. Women do not have equality in fact and their status and welfare continue to cause serious concern to the nation. We have still a long way to go to give equality of educational opportunity to women and a still longer way to give them equality of status. Their "development" is perhaps the most difficult problem of all.

3). Yet another important issue in this field relates to the education of the so-called untouchable or scheduled castes and scheduled tribes who were extremely poor and lived on the fringe of society. Mahatma Gandhi waged a relentless war against untouchability and it was mainly because of his guidance that untouchability has been abolished by law and that its rigours have been considerably reduced in practice. Strenuous efforts have been made by the State in the post-independence period to spread education among these social groups and to improve their status. They get free school education, and even at the school stage, many of them receive assistance for food, clothes, educational materials, etc. At the university stage, almost every student enrolled gets a scholarship. Employment under government has been reserved for them, broadly in proportion to their population. All

these measures have had considerable impact and a new upper or middle class has grown in their midst through education and reserved employment. This new class plays an ambivalent role. Some of its members are co-opted into the system, legitimize it, and become the henchmen of the ruling classes. They still speak in the name of their people but do not really represent them. Others even exploit their own people; and only a very small number are really identified with their people and strive to change the system as a whole. It has also been observed that the benefits of education and reservation have not gone to all the sub-castes among the scheduled castes nor to all the different tribes: it is only a few organised and vocal sub-castes or tribes that have benefitted from these measures. On the whole it appears that the spread of education has made only a minor dent in the basic social, economic and political problems of the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes as a whole (they form about 21 per cent of the total population). It may also be said that this special treatment to these lowest social groups has raised the envy of the lower "middle" castes who are just above the scheduled castes and tribes in the social order, who are equally poor and deprived, and who do not have any of these facilities and privileges.

4) Speaking in terms of castes in the Hindu society, therefore, one may say that education had traditionally favoured only the upper castes. They were also the first to avail themselves of modern education and continued to dominate the educational scene till about 1900 and came to be known as the advanced castes. During the next fifty years, the spread of democracy (as well as the deliberate policy adopted by the British who began to disfavour the advanced castes on the ground that they agitated for political freedom) led to the spread of education among the upper intermediate castes who are numerically large and have control over land and other economic resources. These are known as the dominant castes and are in the saddle at the moment in most parts of the country. The most neglected groups therefore are the lower intermediate castes who are poor and largely deprived in education. The scheduled castes and tribes who are socially lower in the scale with the same difficult handicaps, are equally poor or even poorer, but they have special treatment accorded to them in education and employment. This has naturally provoked conflicts between the lower intermediate castes on the one hand and the scheduled castes and tribes on the other. Some of these are taking an ugly and violent turn in some rural areas of the country.

5) The regional aspect of educational inequalities also requires notice. Some parts of the country like Kerala, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, Maharashtra and Gujarat are more advanced while other areas like Bihar,

Orissa, or Madhya Pradesh are more backward due to natural, historical, social, cultural or economic reasons. There is a wide gap in the educational advance of States like Kerala or Tamil Nadu on the one hand and Bihar or Rajasthan on the other. During the last 30 years, these gaps have been bridged to some extent but the relative position of the States has not changed much on the educational map of the country. In other words, the advanced States continue to be advanced and the backward States continue to be backward. Moreover, there are several backward pockets within each State. Steps are therefore being taken to identify backward areas and to reduce imbalances of educational development between the different regions. As can be easily seen, the success of this programme will largely depend upon the reduction of imbalances in economic development and that is a complex issue to which there is no easy solution.

One last point before we leave this subject. In an inegalitarian society of the type we have in India, "equality" of educational opportunity only means an "equal" opportunity to the underprivileged to rise into the privileged sector through the use of the ladder of education which performs a "selective" as well as an "enabling" role. It is never really possible to give an "equal" opportunity to *all* the underprivileged; and even if it can be done, the game can only lead to frustration because the privileged group continues to be small and exclusive by its very definition. There is very little possibility of solving the problem through equality of educational opportunity alone, unless simultaneous efforts are made, on the political and economic front, to destroy privilege itself.

Quantity

Let us now turn to the discussion of the concepts of education for all and life-long education for all, or a learning society.

The Indian tradition did have a concept of life-long education. In fact, a Brahmin was defined as one who studied all his life. The only weakness was that this right to life-long learning was given only to a select few – a microscopic minority – and not to *every* individual in society. For the average man among the privileged castes, education was not meant for life: it was only a stage in his life. This stage began when he ceased to be an infant, say at about the age of five or six, and its duration depended upon the needs of the individual child. Some studied only the three R's for two or three years while others continued to study for as many as five, ten, or even fifteen years. Generally, education came to an end when the child or young

man started working or got married. For the vast population in the underprivileged sector, there was of course no provision of formal education of any type. In a situation of this kind, the first reform obviously is to make society accept the idea of universal education for all. This implies two things: universal adult literacy and free and compulsory education for children.

Adult Literacy: It is unfortunate that the problem of adult literacy has not received adequate attention in India. At the opening of the nineteenth century, literacy was mostly confined to men and stood at about six per cent of the male or three per cent of the total population. The British made no efforts worth the name to liquidate adult illiteracy and left the problem to solve itself gradually through the spread of primary education among children. Even in 1947 therefore, literacy stood only at 14 per cent. In the post-independence period also, the problem has continued to be neglected: our expenditure on adult education has been less than one per cent of the total educational expenditure and we have, on an average, made about 500,000 adults literate every year. Even in 1971, therefore, adult literacy was only 29 per cent. More than half of the illiterate population of the world is now in India, and the absolute numbers of the illiterates in the total population are increasing. This is a very uneasy aspect to contemplate. It is therefore a matter of satisfaction that the Government of India has, for the first time, decided to launch a major adult education programme with the object of making a hundred million persons literate, especially in the age-group 15-35 (1978). The results will be watched with interest.

Universal Elementary Education: In so far as elementary education is concerned, the picture is much better though not satisfactory. The British refused to accept the idea of free and compulsory elementary education for all children because of administrative and financial considerations. But valiant efforts to this end were made by nationalist leaders during the time of British Rule itself. The idea that every child should be given free and compulsory education for at least four years was first put forward by Dadabhai Naoroji (1882). It was later supported by several nationalist leaders. Gokhale moved a Resolution (1910) and then a Bill (1912) in the Central Legislature for introducing compulsory primary education. But both these efforts failed due mainly to official opposition. However, compulsory education laws were passed in all parts of the country when education was transferred to Indian control (1921). In 1937, Mahatma Gandhi put forward his scheme of basic education which would give seven years of good

education to every child. The progress of primary education was however very limited due to structural, social, economic and financial reasons. Even in 1947, only one child out of three in the age-group of 6-11 and only one child out of eleven in the age-group of 11-14 were enrolled in schools.

In 1950, Article 45 of the Constitution provided that the State should strive to provide free and compulsory education to every child within a period of ten years, i.e. by 1960. But the goal has not been realized even now and one cannot say when it will be realized. The scene has its lights as well as shadows. We have achieved the best results in the provision of facilities: there is now a primary school (grades I-V) within three kilometres of the home of more than 90 per cent of the children in the age-group 6-11 and a middle school (grades VI-VIII) within five kilometres of the home about two-thirds of the children in the age-group 11-14. Also it is not difficult nor will it take long to realise the goal of universal provision. In universal enrolment, our results are less commendable. We have enrolled about 80 per cent of the children aged five (or six or seven) and most of the non-enrolled children are girls or sons of weaker social groups like landless agricultural labourers or scheduled castes and tribes. But our worst achievements are in the field of universal retention. Of every hundred children enrolled, only about 30 reach Grade V and only about 25 reach Grade VIII. What is even worse, these high rates of wastage have remained almost unchanged over the last 30 years. What is needed therefore is more intensive enrolment drives and an earnest effort to reduce wastage through the introduction of multiple-entry systems or channels of part-time non-formal education, especially for those children who are compelled, by economic and social considerations, to work in or outside the family. It is a matter of satisfaction that it is exactly on these lines that a major programme of expansion of elementary education is being developed in the Sixth Plan (1979-83). The results are being watched with great interest.

Secondary Education: What about post-elementary education? Here several options are open. The country can adopt a policy of selective secondary and university education recommended by the Report on Post-War Educational Development in India (1944). It can develop secondary education on an open access basis but introduce selective admissions at the university stage, as recommended by the University Education Commission (1948) and Secondary Education Commission (1952). It can divide the secondary stage into two parts at class X and promote lower secondary education (up to class X) on an open-door basis and have selective admissions for higher secondary education (classes XI-XII) as recommended by the Education

Commission (1964-66). In effect, the country has adopted a policy of reckless expansion of all secondary education in the post-independence period under the social pressures exerted by the upper and middle classes and by the new rich in the rural areas: there are now 40,000 secondary schools (against about 5000 in 1947) with an enrolment of about 12 million (against about 900,000 in 1947). This has had several undesirable consequences on the quality of secondary and higher education and also on the numbers of educated unemployed.

Higher Education: In view of the limited resources available and other priority demands, there is hardly any case for an open-door policy in higher education. Yet, the country has followed a policy of open-door access in higher education and permitted an uncontrolled expansion therein during the post-independence period. This is due to the pressures from the urban, upper and middle classes and the new rural rich. The poor whose vertical mobility depends on higher education also support the same policy. There are now more than 120 universities (against 19 in 1947), 4000 colleges (against about 700 in 1947) and an enrolment of about five million (against only 250,000 in 1947). As at the secondary stage, this had disastrous results on quality and on the employment of the educated.

Pre-primary education has also expanded considerably in the post-independence period. But even now it does not cover more than two per cent of the population in the age-group 3-6. Pre-schools depend mostly on fees for their financial support so that the bulk of pre-school education is meant only for the urban rich and well-to-do classes who can afford to pay for the facility. Similarly, vocational and professional education has also expanded considerably in the post-independence period, particularly in the fields of agriculture, medicine and health. Here also the more prestigious professions have been monopolized by the urban upper and middle classes. As the growth of agriculture, industry or services has not kept pace with this expansion, there is also considerable unemployment even in these sectors and standards have been adversely affected.

The formal system of education in India has expanded immensely in the last 30 years. There are now about 800,000 institutions of all types, 100 million students and 3.5 million teachers. The total educational expenditure is about 25,000 million rupees (against only 570 million in 1947) which ranks next only to that on defence. This is a gain no doubt though one cannot but feel that the system is very wasteful and ineffective. This expansion has contributed somewhat to equality of educational opportunity and has provided a certain degree of vertical mobility to the lower social groups. But

it mainly serves the upper 30 per cent of the population who monopolise 70 per cent of the places in secondary education and 80 per cent of the places in higher education. Its results on quality of education have been far from happy.

The concept of life-long education for all or of a learning society is now being discussed in the country, especially after the publication of Unesco's report on "Learning to Be". But this can only be a distant goal after we have been able to tackle successfully the problems of universal elementary education and liquidation of adult illiteracy.

Quality

What is happening to standards in Indian education over the last two hundred years and especially since the attainment of independence? This is the last aspect of the present enquiry.

A preliminary observation can be made here. During the nineteenth century, the rate of expansion was slow. Education was also restricted to the top social classes and mostly to urban areas. The objectives of education were also limited, viz., to learn the English language, be introduced to western knowledge, and get a job under government or join one of the modern professions like medicine or law. These could be easily achieved by most individuals who joined the system. Therefore, there was, on the whole, a satisfaction with the development of education. But by 1900, a dissatisfaction began, both among the Indians and among the British. The Indians were dissatisfied by the slow rate of expansion and by the obvious failure of the system to inculcate values like love of the motherland or to link itself effectively to national development. The British were dissatisfied by the rapid expansion of secondary and higher education, by the growth of indiscipline (which meant the rise of nationalism) and by the lowering of quality (which mostly meant a lesser command over the English language). These opposite evaluations led to a confrontation which ended only with the attainment of independence in 1947.

Another observation is that anyone who reads the history of Indian education since 1900 is struck by one fact: every generation laments a deterioration in standards and it thus appears that there has been a continuous fall in the quality of education over the last seventy or eighty years. This is only a partial truth and the real situation is far more complicated.

1) The Indian educational system is a "dual" system and consists of a

core of good institutions, mostly private and fee-charging, with a highly selective system of admissions which have been able to attract good teachers and maintain able management. They have always provided good education and maintained standards which are often internationally comparable. Their main weakness is that they combine quality with privilege and are mostly availed of by the well-to-do. Many of them also use English as a medium of instruction at all levels. The number of such institutions has risen over the years and especially since 1947. The Education Commission is therefore right in asserting that, in this sense, the quality of education has only improved over the years and that there are now more good institutions and more good students than at any time in the past.

2) But this core of good quality institutions is surrounded by a large penumbra of institutions of medium or poor (or even very poor) quality which are mostly in the public sector and largely utilized by the common people. It is in these institutions that no selective admissions are made and therefore it is they that absorb most of the expansion that takes place. They also never get resources in proportion to the expansion or in relation to their needs. They are also increasingly attended by the less motivated students and by the children of the poorer sections of society or of the lower classes and castes. By and large, they do not attract the best teachers and their physical plant leaves a good deal to be desired. It is in these institutions that standards are continually going down.

The over-all picture of quality is therefore one of both light and shade, the standards going up in the small core system meant for the haves, even as they are going down in the large penumbra of schools meant for the have-nots. Such a dual system is the inevitable result of scarcity where the powerful haves ensure good education for their children but do not accept any responsibility for providing similar education to "other" people's children. The situation is due to a close link between privilege in society and quality in education. It is not easy to break this link and it is even more difficult to break privilege itself.

One would also like to highlight the fact that the definition of quality itself has not remained constant and has been changing over the years in response to social, cultural, economic and political factors. Some illustrations may help to clarify the issue.

1) For a long time in the early years, almost up to 1921, the most prized thing in education was the command over the English language which became almost synonymous with "quality" in education. This view continues to dominate, although indirectly, even today because, in spite of everything, English still continues to be the language of good employment

and has led to a fantastic growth of English-medium schools for the haves in the post-independence period. In fact, in these schools the use of English as a medium of instruction has descended from the university to the pre-school stage while, at the same time, it is the use of regional languages as media of instruction that has risen from the primary to university stage in the schools for the have-nots. To many critics of the educational system therefore quality of education still means the command over the English language. While one need not underrate the utility and value of English which provides direct access to the world's ever growing knowledge, it is not proper to over-emphasize the place of English in Indian education nor to equate quality with command over English as a language.

2) The Indian tradition in education is one that emphasizes verbal fluency, linguistic ability and capacity to remember and reproduce. This tradition also denigrates manual labour. Quality is therefore often defined in terms of linguistic ability and verbal fluency while all other developments of personality, and especially manual skills, are either under-estimated or ignored. This is also a definition of quality one cannot accept and laments about the deterioration of this quality have to be taken with a pinch of salt.

3) Attempts to define quality in terms of inputs are quite common. For instance, one judges quality by such measures as general education and professional training of teachers, class-size, quality of buildings and equipment, curricula used and text-books prescribed etc. On this basis, however, it is not possible to say whether standards in education are going up or down. But it is now generally agreed that these measures have proved to be fallacious and that indicators based on them are not very dependable.

4) Quality is sometimes defined by the output. Examination results are one such indicator though not quite dependable. But if the type of students coming out – their knowledge, skills and values – is a criterion of quality, the evidence is again a confirmation of the earlier statement that standards are going up in some directions and going down in others.

On the whole it appears that not enough academic work is done to define what quality in education really means and how it can be measured in different areas at the same time or at different times in the same area. In the absence of such definition and data, the discussion of deterioration or improvement of standards over time tends to become very subjective.

It may also be admitted that the cause of quality in education has suffered for several reasons.

1) At present, the total resources available are limited; and as the claims of expansion (which also indirectly implies an attempt to create equality) have greater priority, qualitative programmes are relegated to a second place

and given very inadequate resources.

2) It is far more difficult to develop qualitative programmes. Hence the educational administrators have a preference for quantitative programmes which can be easily organized.

3) Qualitative improvement, especially at the secondary and university stages, needs a deliberate attempt to concentrate resources in terms of men, money and materials, at a few selected centres or on a few programmes of great priority. It has not been possible, on so-called grounds of democracy, to make a selective approach to qualitative development on a worthwhile scale. For instance, the recommendation of the Education Commission that about 10 per cent of the institutions at all stages should be selected, in the first instance, for qualitative improvement has not been accepted. Nor has it been possible, for similar pressures to concentrate on selected programmes and hence the available meagre resources have generally been spread too thinly over a wide area.

4) Programmes of qualitative improvement need money which, as stated above, has been in short supply. But even more importantly, they need careful planning and intensive human effort, especially on the part of students and teachers. These inputs have been even more scarce.

5) Very often, qualitative improvement achieved at great cost and effort is simply washed away by such factors as student unrest, strikes by teachers, students and other employees, political and communal disturbances, etc.

As the Education Commission (1964-66) pointed out, programmes of qualitative improvement need to be accorded much higher priority than has been accorded to them in the past. Educational standards have to be adequate, kept continually rising, and should be internationally comparable, at least in some key sectors. Apart from additional resources, this implies a very big challenge to educational administrators, teachers and students and the organization of a nation-wide movement for school improvement. For various reasons, it has not been possible to organize such a movement and the overall commitment and contribution of administrators, teachers and students to this programme has been marginal.

Concluding Observations

The experience of free India summarized in the above paragraphs is not unique and is probably repeated in many developing countries in its essential features. It does highlight the contradictions and immense problems in-

involved in bringing about a transformation of the educational system on the principles of equality of educational opportunity, life-long education for all and the maintenance of standards, especially when resources are scarce and the over-all social situation is inequalitarian and hierarchical. What is needed probably is a new approach with three distinctive features: 1) Simultaneous transformation of society and the educational system on complementary and mutually supportive lines; 2) a transformation of the present educational structure with an emphasis on learning rather than teaching, and an appropriate combination of all the three channels of incidental, non-formal and formal education; and 3) investment of large resources accompanied by careful determination of priorities and dedicated efforts of administrators, teachers and students. This, of course, is easier said than done which only implies that education is one of the toughest problems that Man is called upon to handle. The effort must however be made because, in the last analysis, it is education alone that stands between Man and Catastrophe.